

July 19, 2018

The Honorable Ajit Pai, Michael O’Rielly, Brendan Carr, & Jessica Rosenworcel  
Federal Communication Commission  
445 12th Street SW  
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Pai & Members of the Federal Communications Commission,

We write in regard to the Federal Communications Commission’s mission to ensure that communications services, including broadband internet access service, are available to and affordable for all. Universal service has long been the animating goal of all U.S. communications policy, in Congress and at the Commission. The Commission’s universal service programs promote broadband deployment in rural communities; affordable access for low-income families; and connectivity for schools, libraries, and rural health care providers. Each of these programs are critical components of the federal government’s effort to close the digital divide, and the Commission’s focus is rightly placed on updating USF programs for the broadband era.

The Lifeline program was established under President Reagan, and modernized under both Presidents Bush and Obama to better reflect a 21st Century communications marketplace. The program currently supports fixed and mobile voice and broadband services, and provides \$9.25 in monthly assistance to more than 10 million low-income households, including 1.2 million Veterans and 1.4 million seniors, to help them access essential communications services. Lifeline is critical for these families to find and keep jobs, schedule doctor’s appointments, complete homework assignments, and stay in touch with loved ones. Public safety and our economy are improved when everyone has the ability to dial 9-1-1, communicate with an employer, and access education—both children and adults. With over 30 million households qualifying for the Lifeline subsidy, it is critical that the Commission ensure that the Lifeline program remains available to those that need the program.

Since 2012, the Commission has taken numerous steps to safeguard the integrity of the Lifeline program. To that end, we strongly support the FCC’s planned independent third-party national eligibility verification database. This effort will ensure that eligibility is determined according to the Commission’s rules and will prevent ineligible subscribers from enrolling. By relying on existing state databases as a foundation, the verifier will provide maximum effectiveness and accuracy. We understand that six states have begun participating in the independent verifier, and that all states will be participating by the end of 2019. The full implementation of the eligibility verification database is projected to have a large impact on the program’s performance. We urge you to move forward quickly to implement the National Verifier as planned before contemplating further changes to the program.

As the Government Accountability Office testified before the Senate last year, the National Verifier is likely to sufficiently address remaining issues regarding the integrity of the Lifeline

program. While the National Verifier is being implemented, the Commission should not take any further steps that could create uncertainty in the Lifeline program, prevent or disincentivize eligible providers from offering Lifeline-supported service, or take any actions that could have the unintended consequence of making it more difficult for low-income families to obtain affordable communications services.

We have confidence that the Commission will manage the resources of the Lifeline program prudently and effectively. Additionally, we appreciate the FCC's continued transparency by keeping us and the American people apprised of the program's effectiveness in helping to close the digital divide. We look forward to working with you to ensure the success of the Lifeline program.

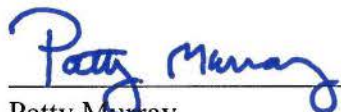
Sincerely



Tom Udall  
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator



Patty Murray  
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Jack Reed  
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator





FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

August 10, 2018

The Honorable Tom Udall  
United States Senate  
531 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Udall:

Thank you for your letter on the Lifeline program. I am committed to bridging the digital divide, and, like you, I believe the Lifeline program can help do just that.

That is why the Commission adopted the *2017 Lifeline Reform Order*, which seeks to focus Lifeline support where it is most needed and incentivize investment in networks that enable 21<sup>st</sup> century connectivity for all Americans. The *Order* increased consumer choice by eliminating restrictions that barred Lifeline consumers from changing Lifeline providers for a year. It also protected consumers by barring low-quality services that offered mobile broadband in theory but failed to do so in practice (such as Wi-Fi-only “mobile” broadband, which doesn’t help consumers who lack home broadband or aren’t otherwise near a Wi-Fi hotspot like a coffee shop).

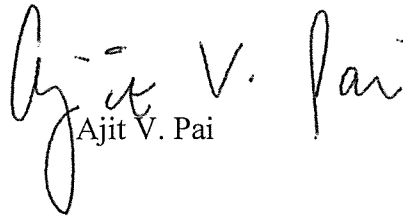
At the same time, I am deeply committed to ensuring that the Commission fulfills its obligation to be a responsible steward of the Universal Service Fund. It is critical to strengthen the Lifeline program’s efficacy and integrity by reducing the waste, fraud, and abuse that has run rampant in this program for the better part of a decade. For example, following a request for investigation by Senators Claire McCaskill and Rob Portman, the Government Accountability Office discovered 1,234,929 Lifeline subscribers who apparently were not eligible to participate in the program as well as 6,378 individuals who apparently enrolled or recertified after being reported as deceased. That limited sample alone constituted more than \$137 million in abuse each year. That’s money that could be better spent building out broadband in low-income neighborhoods and making broadband more affordable in for low-income families and veterans living in rural America on Tribal lands.

I agree with you that the National Lifeline Accountability Database and the National Verifier are important tools for eliminating waste, fraud, and abuse. But they are not the only ones, nor will they solve all the problems with the program. It simply isn’t prudent to sit idly by when hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars are at stake. To address this, in a *Notice of Proposed Rulemaking* accompanying the *Order*, the Commission sought comment on a wide variety of measures to improve the administration of the Lifeline program—from re-empowering state commissions to police Lifeline carriers to partnering with the states to stand up the National Verifier, from improving program audits to adopting a self-enforcing budget. We are currently reviewing the record that has been compiled in response to the Notice to determine the best path

forward, and your letter had been added to that record. The Lifeline program's goal is—or should be—to empower consumers, not companies. And that will be our lodestar as we move forward to ensure that unscrupulous companies stop abusing this important program.

I appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

Ajit V. Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

August 10, 2018

The Honorable Maggie Hassan  
United States Senate  
B85 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Hassan:

Thank you for your letter on the Lifeline program. I am committed to bridging the digital divide, and, like you, I believe the Lifeline program can help do just that.

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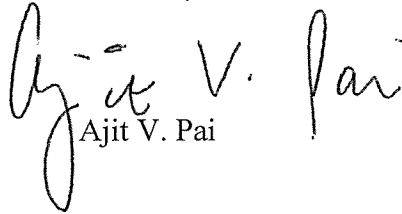
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Sincerely,

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Ajit V. Pai





FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

August 10, 2018

The Honorable Patty Murray  
United States Senate  
154 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Murray:

Thank you for your letter on the Lifeline program. I am committed to bridging the digital divide, and, like you, I believe the Lifeline program can help do just that.

That is why the Commission adopted the *2017 Lifeline Reform Order*, which seeks to focus Lifeline support where it is most needed and incentivize investment in networks that enable 21<sup>st</sup> century connectivity for all Americans. The *Order* increased consumer choice by eliminating restrictions that barred Lifeline consumers from changing Lifeline providers for a year. It also protected consumers by barring low-quality services that offered mobile broadband in theory but failed to do so in practice (such as Wi-Fi-only “mobile” broadband, which doesn’t help consumers who lack home broadband or aren’t otherwise near a Wi-Fi hotspot like a coffee shop).

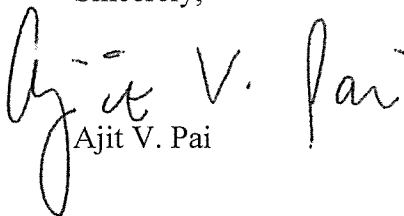
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Ajit V. Pai





FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

August 10, 2018

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senate  
530 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Whitehouse:

Thank you for your letter on the Lifeline program. I am committed to bridging the digital divide, and, like you, I believe the Lifeline program can help do just that.

That is why the Commission adopted the *2017 Lifeline Reform Order*, which seeks to focus Lifeline support where it is most needed and incentivize investment in networks that enable 21<sup>st</sup> century connectivity for all Americans. The *Order* increased consumer choice by eliminating restrictions that barred Lifeline consumers from changing Lifeline providers for a year. It also protected consumers by barring low-quality services that offered mobile broadband in theory but failed to do so in practice (such as Wi-Fi-only “mobile” broadband, which doesn’t help consumers who lack home broadband or aren’t otherwise near a Wi-Fi hotspot like a coffee shop).

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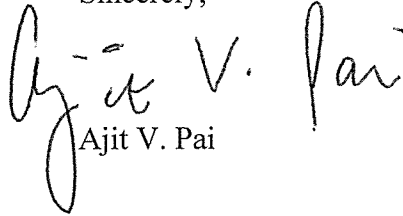
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Ajit V. Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

August 10, 2018

The Honorable Martin Heinrich  
United States Senate  
303 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Heinrich:

Thank you for your letter on the Lifeline program. I am committed to bridging the digital divide, and, like you, I believe the Lifeline program can help do just that.

That is why the Commission adopted the *2017 Lifeline Reform Order*, which seeks to focus Lifeline support where it is most needed and incentivize investment in networks that enable 21<sup>st</sup> century connectivity for all Americans. The *Order* increased consumer choice by eliminating restrictions that barred Lifeline consumers from changing Lifeline providers for a year. It also protected consumers by barring low-quality services that offered mobile broadband in theory but failed to do so in practice (such as Wi-Fi-only “mobile” broadband, which doesn’t help consumers who lack home broadband or aren’t otherwise near a Wi-Fi hotspot like a coffee shop).

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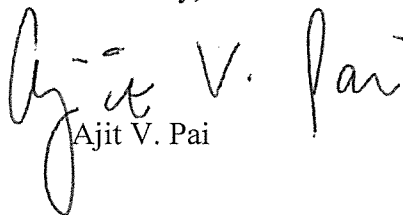
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Ajit V. Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

August 10, 2018

The Honorable Edward J. Markey  
United States Senate  
255 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Markey:

Thank you for your letter on the Lifeline program. I am committed to bridging the digital divide, and, like you, I believe the Lifeline program can help do just that.

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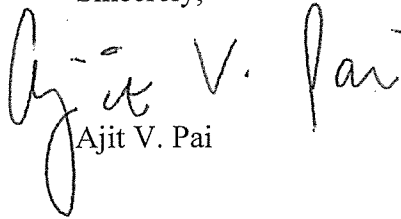
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Ajit V. Pai





FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

August 10, 2018

The Honorable Jack Reed  
United States Senate  
728 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Reed:

Thank you for your letter on the Lifeline program. I am committed to bridging the digital divide, and, like you, I believe the Lifeline program can help do just that.

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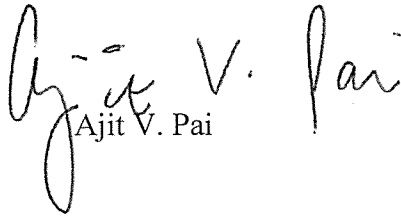
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August 10, 2018

The Honorable Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senate  
G12 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Duckworth:

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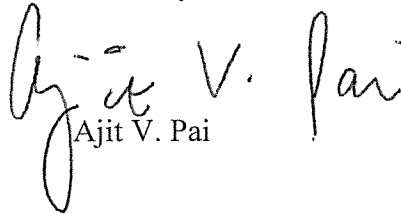


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